

THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF PITTSBURG

HISTORICAL SKETCH

The Presbyterian Church of Pittsburg, Kansas was officially organized on January 1, 1986, as a result of the merger of two historic Presbyterian congregations. Members of the First United Presbyterian Church at Fourth and Walnut Streets and the First Presbyterian Church at Sixth and Pine Streets voted on October 27, 1985, to accept the proposal of the Merger Committee. The two churches had cooperated and shared activities for a number of years.

The Congregation of the newly organized Church accepted the By-Laws, elected officers, and approved the budget at the first corporate meeting on November 20, 1985. The merged congregation met for the first worship service on January 5, 1986. The Reverend Doctor Robert K. Docherty of The First United Presbyterian Church and The Reverend Charles Carson of The First Presbyterian Church were called to serve the new congregation as co-pastors.

The two former churches had provided spiritual leadership and community services in Pittsburg since 1879. Many members of both churches have served the Pittsburg community in positions of leadership in the area of business, education, industry, medicine, and in political and religious activities.

The First United Presbyterian Church of Pittsburg was started on April 29, 1880, with twelve charter members. The Reverend Josiah H. Gibson, pastor of the Beulah, Kansas United Presbyterian Church served as their minister during the organization of the new church. On January 1, 1881, Reverend Gibson accepted the call of the new church and served the members for sixteen years before retiring in 1907.

The first church services were held in homes of members. Later the worship services were held on the second floor of a building on the Northwest corner of Third and Broadway. In 1891, the Church purchased the Tabernacle Methodist Church building on the Northwest corner of Fifth and Pine Streets. The red brick building was used for twenty-five years.

Both the Presbyterian Churches enjoyed outstanding music programs. In 1924, a new Reuter Electric Pneumatic Organ with chimes was dedicated. Through the efforts of Reverend Caylor, a forty voice choir was established. Many of the local college students were given scholarships to sing in the choir. Students also participated in the choir under the direction of professor Richard Smith and organist Mrs. M. S. Stucky.

The First Presbyterian Church of Pittsburg, Kansas was organized on March 12, 1879, by a Presbyterian Committee on the petition of fifteen local people who became charter members. Reverend Warren Mayo, pastor of The Presbyterian Church of Girard, Kansas, headed the committee that helped to found the Church. The first meetings were held in Waskey's Hall, a room above the Jernigan's hardware store located at 317 North Broadway. Worship services were held in Waskey's Hall until February 10, 1884; then the frame school house located on the Northwest corner of Fifth and Walnut was used. The

Bottenfield Buidling is now on this location.

The Reverend Francis M. Symmes was the first full-time minister of the Church. He accepted the call on May 6, 1883, and served as the minister until October 26, 1885. A new church building was dedicated on January 4, 1885. It was a small frame building located on the corner of Eight and Pine Streets. The manse at that time was located at 805 North Pine Street. After the resignation of Reverend Symmes, The Reverend H. S. Sharpless assumed his duties on October 1, 1886. He shared time with the Presbyterian Church at Weir, Kansas. The Reverend C. H. McCreary was installed on June 3, 1888, succeeding Reverend Sharpless who had resigned on November 6, 1887. Reverend McCreary resigned in 1889, and a call was accepted by Reverend A. M. Mann from Louisburg, Kansas. In 1890, during the pastorate of Reverend Mann, the church building was enlarged to care for the increased number in the congregation. Reverend Mann and his family relocated in 1891. He was succeeded by Reverend Gerrit Snyder who served the Church for nine years.

The Women's Missionary Society was organized on January 15, 1892, at the home of Mrs. J. H. Gibson. The Society supported many home and foreign mission activities for almost one hundred years.

In 1907, Reverend A. H. Griffith of Oklahoma City was called to the pastorate. The Church experienced much growth before his resignation in 1908. In 1909, Reverend R. W. Thompson was called to serve as pastor. Under his leadership mission churches were established on Quincy Avenue in Pittsburg, in Dunkirk, and in Mulberry, Kansas.

The Church purchased land at Fourth and Walnut Streets for a new church building. The cornerstone was laid on June 13, 1915, and the new edifice was dedicated on May 21, 1916. The Reverend Thompson preached in the new church building until his resignation in 1918 to take a pastorate in Iowa. In 1918, Reverend J. Harper Hutchman and family came to Pittsburg. During his first year of ministry, the Congregational Church, located at Third and Walnut Streets, voted to unite with the First United Presbyterian Church. The merger took place on Sunday, February 8, 1919. Reverend Hutchman served until 1940, when he asked for retirement at age 78. The Reverend Arthur Armstrong accepted the call of the Church in 1940 and served until 1946. The Reverend Harold R. Karnes served as pastor from 1947 until 1954. Then Reverend Ellsworth E. Caylor and his family came to serve as pastor in Pittsburg. Mr. Caylor served until August, 1959, when he resigned to take a pastorate in Ottawa, Kansas. The Reverend Doctor Walter Farris came to The First United Presbyterian Church in 1960. He resigned in 1964 to organize a new church in St. Petersburg, Florida. Many of his sermons were broadcast on the local radio station. A call was issued and accepted by Reverend Frederick J. Lenk in 1964. He and his family were the first to use the new manse built at 807 Twin Lakes Drive. He served until 1975, when he resigned to take a pastorate in Clay Center, Kansas. After the resigna-

tion of Reverend Lenk, Reverend George Ott, a retired minister from Baxter Springs, Kansas served the congregation until 1977. The Reverend Doctor Robert K. Docherty accepted the call in 1977 and served until the two churches merged in 1986.

It was under the leadership of Reverend Snyder that plans were made for a new church building. The A. H. Lanyon property on the Southeast corner of Sixth and Pine Streets was purchased in 1906. The cornerstone was laid in 1907. It was not until 1913 that the building was dedicated under the leadership of Reverend C. L. Alspach, the minister at that time. The building is presently being used by the newly organized Presbyterian Church of Pittsburg.

The Reverend J. N. McDonald succeeded Reverend Alspach, and served the Church during World War I. Reverend Charles J. Armentrot became the minister in 1921. He served until 1928, when Reverend A. B. Miller became pastor. Reverend Miller served until 1946, and was followed by Reverend Wallace Faris; and in 1950, Reverend Doctor Homer Keith was installed as the minister. He served until he retired in 1981 after thirty-one years of service to the congregation. The Reverend Steve Washburn served one year as interim pastor. The Reverend Charles Carson was called in 1982. He continued his ministry as co-pastor of the merged church until June 1988.

Doctor Walter McCray became director of music in the church in 1914 and continued until 1954. He was assisted by two outstanding organists. Miss Nora Neal of the college music faculty served until 1923. She was succeeded by Rose Buchmann, also a music faculty member. She served until 1954. In 1954, Professor Walter Osadchuk became the director and Mrs. Dorothy Lampton became the organist. She served for twenty-eight years and Professor Osadchuk served as director twenty-one years. Doctor Marshall Turley, Janis DeChicchio, and Doctor Millard Laing have recently served as music directors. Mrs. Doris Williams was serving as organist when the churches were merged. The first organ was installed in 1915 through the efforts of Doctor McCray. It was replaced with a new Reuter Organ in 1969.

The Ladies Aid Society was active in the Church for many years. One noteworthy accomplishment of the Society was raising funds for the many stained glass windows in the church building. Over the many years of their service they were active in many other projects for the First Presbyterian Church.

A special thanks to Ben Vineyard for compiling this historical sketch.

WE MERGED
